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FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5861  
INFO RUEHKK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS JERUSALEM 001515

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND IPA, NSC FOR SHAPIRO/KUMAR,  
DEPT PASS TO USAID FOR BORODIN

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [KISL](#) [KWMN](#) [SCUL](#)

SUBJECT: HAMAS IMPOSES CONSERVATIVE DRESS FOR SCHOOL GIRLS

11. (SBU) Summary. The school year in Gaza began on August 23 with Hamas imposing a requirement for girls to wear conservative Islamic dress. Teachers and administrative staff were also directed to work segregated by gender. This follows a July order requiring female lawyers to appear in court in conservative dress, and seems to be the latest attempt to impose conservative Islamic social behavior in the Gaza Strip. End summary.

12. (SBU) Contacts in Gaza report that Hamas-run public schools have begun requiring female secondary school pupils to wear the hijab, a head scarf, and the jilbab, a long-sleeved dress, as of August 23, the first day of the school year. According to the media, students who failed to comply were reprimanded and instructed to return to class the next day in compliance with the new dress code. OCHA contacts in Gaza reported that the vast majority of (Hamas-appointed) teachers support the policy, and some schools displayed banners announcing it. While Palestinian news media has reported some students' displeasure with the new rules, contacts in Gaza expect all students to comply. The Palestinian Authority (PA) Ministry of Education, based in Ramallah, issued a statement condemning the new policy in Gaza as a violation of human rights and of the Palestinian Basic Law. Gaza-based international NGOs also voiced opposition to the policy, with little effect.

13. (SBU) This decision appears to have been executed at the district level, and the role of the Hamas "government" in the policy change remains unclear. Following the media storm about the issue, Hamas "authorities" expressed support for the new dress code in the press, and criticized the PA's response. Media and local contacts noted that the Hamas "government" may have given schools the authority to determine their own dress code, with the understanding that conservative attire would be required. CHF contacts in Gaza noted that local stores already replaced the traditional school uniforms with jilbabs.

14. (SBU) The media also reported that male teachers and administrative staff are now forbidden to work at girls' schools, and the same rule will apply to female teachers and staff concerning boys' schools. According to the latest statistics provided by PA Ministry of Education, 235,131 students attended public schools in Gaza during 2005-2006, and 26,172 were girls in secondary school. According to UNRWA, another 198,860 students attend its schools, which operate independently from the Hamas-controlled "Ministry of Education" in Gaza.

15. (SBU) This new policy appears to be the latest step in a campaign to impose conservative Islamic behavior. On July 26, the chief justice of the Hamas judicial system required female lawyers to wear a hijab and jilbab in court. Over the last few months, Hamas authorities have pressured civil

society organizations to separate boys and girls in organized youth activities. "Modesty patrols," while still relatively uncommon in the streets of Gaza, reportedly have forced women to wear the hijab, especially at Gaza's beaches, and have inspected cars to prevent unmarried couples spending time together alone. Contacts reported that nearly all women now wear the hijab in certain public areas, like markets, due to the increasingly conservative environment.

WALLES